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African Opinion on U.S. Policies, Values, and People

I. Introduction

Thank you for inviting me to address this Committee. I am delighted to have an opportunity to speak with you about how Africans view the United States, its people, its policies and its values.

Much of the world has experienced a growing wave of anti-American sentiment in recent years. Various polls and attitudinal surveys appear to discern growing hostility to American foreign policy as well as to American society and culture. Yet, in Sub Saharan Africa, attitudes about the United States are generally positive. While anti-Americanism in the Middle East, Europe, and Latin America has attracted considerable attention, scholars have largely ignored the positive example of Africa. My research examines causes of African pro-Americanism, in hopes of assisting in the preservation of positive sentiments in Africa, and as means for discovering what might help improve America's image elsewhere.

My analysis of public opinion polls suggests that Africans¹ are exposed to positive images of the United States through their media. African governments dependent on foreign assistance have a lot to lose from publicly criticizing western powers. News programs created by state-controlled media houses, as well as international programs from western sources, are likely to be especially flattering of the U.S. (and Europe). Contrary to my initial expectations, knowledge of U.S. foreign policies does not seem to affect attitudes about America. However, the tone of specific sources does appear to matter—with television (still largely state-controlled), international programs, personal contacts and travel to America expanding support for the United States and radio and internet use reducing it.

The data is also consistent with the argument that Africans approve of the U.S. because they view it as source of economic and political opportunity as well as being the focus of an enticing popular culture. Interestingly, the U.S. does not seem to benefit relative to Europe from its historical image as an anti-colonial power or its image as a multi-racial society. If anything, former colonial powers seem to benefit from their larger historical or current involvement in

¹ When I present evidence on the views of "Africans", I am referring to Africans living in those countries and sub-national areas that are represented by survey evidence. The public opinion data comes disproportionately from former British colonies: relatively wealthy, developed, and democratic African countries and urban areas. The representative nature of each survey is detailed in subsequent footnotes.

Africa. The statistical results imply that greater access to American goods, business opportunities, cultural exchanges, development resources and democracy assistance would be welcomed by Africans, and would help to ensure that the U.S. retains its many friends among the African mass public.

This testimony proceeds as follows: First, I establish that Africans are generally pro-American in both absolute and comparative terms. Second, I determine the characteristics that are associated with pro and anti-American individuals in Africa. Third, I describe five hypotheses for pro-American attitudes in Africa. To the extent possible, the hypotheses are evaluated against available public opinion data. I conclude by summarizing my main results, and then questioning the impact and future trajectory of African attitudes about the United States.

II. Pro-American Attitudes in Africa

Public opinion polls show a robust positive picture of African attitudes about America. African expressions of approval for the United States: 1) exceed expressions of disapproval; 2) are more prevalent than pro-American attitudes in other regions of the world; 3) extend to support for different facets of American society; and 4) persist over time and across polls.

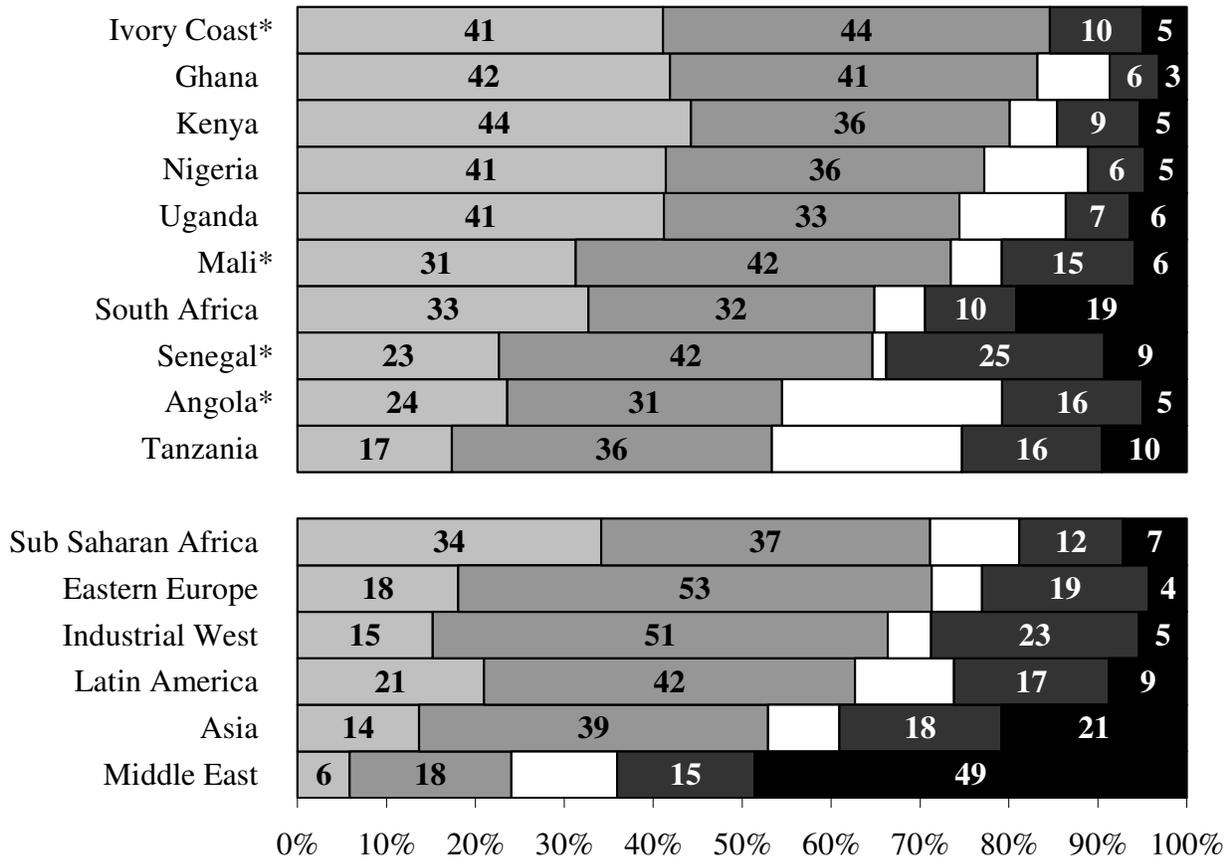
First, the majority of survey respondents in Africa are positively disposed towards the United States. Between July and October 2002, the Pew Global Attitudes Project conducted survey interviews with more than 38,000 individuals living in 42 countries, including 10 Sub Saharan African countries. Figure 1 shows the percent of respondents who answered that their opinion of the United States was “very favorable”, “somewhat favorable”, “somewhat unfavorable”, and “very unfavorable” for each African country and for each region of the world.² The middle category represents those respondents who refused to answer the question or said they do not have an opinion. While there is some variation within Africa, the majority of respondents in every single African country included in the survey expressed favorable attitudes about the United States. Furthermore, the proportion of citizens who expressed unfavorable attitudes is as low as 9 percent in Ghana and never exceeds the 34 percent recorded in Senegal.

Second, Africans are more favorably disposed towards the United States than respondents in other regions of the world. Figure 1 shows that highly enthusiastic United States supporters are most prevalent in Africa (at 34 percent). Along with Eastern Europe, Africa has the largest proportion of pro-American respondents: those who say they are somewhat or very favorable. Africans also espouse the least anti-American sentiment of the six regions.

² The regions are as follows: 1) Sub Saharan Africa includes Angola, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda; 2) Eastern Europe includes Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Poland, Russia, Slovak Republic, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan; 3) The industrial west includes Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, and Italy; 4) Latin America includes Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela; 5) Asia includes Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Japan, Pakistan, Philippines, South Korea, and Vietnam; and 6) the Middle East and North Africa includes Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey.

Figure 1: Percentages of Pro-American and Anti-American Attitudes

□ Very Favorable ■ Somewhat Favorable □ No Opinion ■ Somewhat Unfavorable ■ Very Unfavorable



* Disproportionately urban samples.

Survey Question: “Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of the United States.”

Source: Pew Research Center for People and the Press. 2002. “Global Attitudes Project 44-Nation Survey.”

Third, African approval of the United States extends beyond favorability for the country in general, to support for different aspects of American society and for its people. Table 1 shows the percentage of positive and negative opinions, out of the total number of respondents by region, for the ten different questions about the United States that were asked in the 2002 Pew Survey.³ The third column, the approval index equals the percentage of positive opinions minus the percentage of negative opinions, which can be used to judge the overall level of opinion about the United States. A positive number indicates a plurality of pro-American sentiment and a negative number indicates a plurality of negative perceptions. These data show that more Africans think that U.S. policies are increasing rather than lessening the gap between rich and poor countries, and that the spread of American ideas and customs is a bad rather than a good thing (although the magnitude of critical opinion was less severe in Africa than in other regions of the world). On all other fronts, more African respondents say they are pleased rather than dissatisfied with American behaviors, policies, qualities, products and accomplishments.

³ Note that the percentages of positive and negative responses do not total 100 because of non-response.

Table 1: Dimensions of Pro and Anti-Americanism

	Percent Positive	Percent Negative	Approval Index	Percent Positive	Percent Negative	Approval Index
	Pro-American Attitudes			American People		
Sub Saharan Africa	71.1	18.9	52.3	70.3	19.3	50.9
Eastern Europe	71.3	23.0	48.3	73.9	19.1	54.8
Industrial West	66.4	28.8	37.6	74.1	20.2	53.9
Latin America	62.7	26.2	36.5	60.0	26.0	34.0
Asia	52.9	39.1	13.8	57.7	33.4	24.3
Middle East	24.0	64.1	-40.0	36.0	50.4	-14.3
World	58.9	32.2	26.6	61.9	27.9	33.9
	U.S. Business			U.S. Democracy		
Sub Saharan Africa	63.2	22.4	40.8	67.6	21.1	46.5
Eastern Europe	52.9	26.5	26.4	50.0	33.3	16.7
Industrial West	32.7	55.3	-22.6	46.2	43.5	2.7
Latin America	45.2	40.7	4.5	43.5	42.1	1.4
Asia	43.0	31.8	11.2	40.9	40.0	0.9
Middle East	42.3	46.4	-4.1	36.8	54.4	-17.6
World	47.8	34.2	13.6	49.1	36.7	12.4
	U.S. Technology and Science			U.S. Popular Culture		
Sub Saharan Africa	85.2	8.8	76.4	64.4	28.6	35.8
Eastern Europe	63.6	28.0	35.6	55.0	38.2	16.8
Industrial West	70.5	25.0	45.5	69.0	25.7	43.3
Latin America	77.1	18.7	58.4	60.5	33.1	27.4
Asia	78.5	9.8	68.7	40.9	49.0	-8.2
Middle East	64.9	28.3	36.6	42.7	50.9	-8.2
World	75.8	16.4	59.4	53.1	39.2	13.9
	U.S. International Policies			U.S. Policies Against Terrorism		
Sub Saharan Africa	52.9	34.8	18.0	62.4	29.2	33.2
Eastern Europe	30.0	63.5	-33.5	78.6	14.6	64.0
Industrial West	50.6	45.8	4.8	76.3	18.5	57.8
Latin America	46.7	47.2	-0.5	62.3	31.1	31.2
Asia	40.9	40.9	-0.1	47.1	38.8	8.3
Middle East	20.4	71.8	-51.4	21.6	69.4	-47.8
World	42.1	47.5	-5.4	57.6	33.4	24.2
	U.S. Policies and Global Equality			Spread of U.S. Ideas and Customs		
Sub Saharan Africa	33.6	40.7	-7.1	44.4	48.1	-3.8
Eastern Europe	13.9	51.4	-37.5	29.8	57.2	-27.4
Industrial West	12.8	56.8	-44.0	30.4	61.2	-30.7
Latin America	21.5	58.5	-37.0	29.9	61.8	-32.0
Asia	17.2	50.6	-33.4	24.6	64.3	-39.7
Middle East	13.6	61.8	-48.2	14.1	77.8	-63.6
World	20.1	52.0	-31.8	30.0	60.6	-30.7

Source: Pew Research Center for People and the Press. 2002. "Global Attitudes Project 44-Nation Survey."

Table 1 also indicates that Africa is the most approving region for seven of the ten dimensions quantified.⁴ African respondents expressed more pro-American than anti-American sentiments as compared to citizens in other regions when asked if they: 1) have favorable opinions about the United States; 2) like American ways of doing business; 3) like American ideas about democracy; 4) admire the United States for its technological and scientific advances; 5) think the United States takes into account the interests of other countries when making international policy decisions; 6) think the United States' policies lessen the gap between rich and poor countries; and 7) believe the spread of American ideas and customs is a good thing. Africa is second only to the industrial west when it comes to liking American popular culture (music, movies, and television). Africa is third of the six regions in expressions of positive opinions about the American people, and in favoring U.S.-led efforts to fight terrorism. The industrial west and Eastern Europe outrank Africa on these two dimensions, although Africa is still well above the figures for the world as a whole. In sum, Africans express greater approval than other regions of the world with respect to most facets of American society.

Fourth, African expressions of affection for the United States are not simply a product of the Pew survey or lingering effects of 9/11 during the summer of 2002. A BBC World Service poll of 33 countries conducted between October 2005 and January 2006 also indicates that Africa is the region with the most positive assessment of the United States as compared to other regions of the world.⁵ In each of the eight African countries where the poll was conducted, more citizens responded that they thought the United States was "having a mainly positive influence in the world" than said it was "having a mainly negative influence". Furthermore, the approval index (the percentage of positive responses minus the percentage of negative responses) was higher for Africa than for Eastern Europe, the industrial west, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East. Additionally, in the 2004 Voice of the People annual survey by Gallup International Association, Africa is the only region where a larger percentage of citizens responded positively as opposed to negatively in response to the question "Generally, do you think American foreign policy has a positive effect on your country, a negative effect or does American foreign policy have no effect on your country?"⁶ Three surveys spanning two years (each conducted by a different organization and including more than a dozen African countries) clearly depict Africans as especially pro-American. In sum, opinion polls record widespread, robust, multifaceted, and persistent support for the United States within Sub Saharan Africa.

⁴ In other words, the approval index (the percentage of positive responses minus the percentage of negative responses) is more positive (or less negative) in Africa than in other regions.

⁵ Nationally representative surveys were conducted in all eight African countries: Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. In a report on the survey, the authors note: "The poll of 39,435 people was conducted for the BBC World Service by the international polling firm GlobeScan together with the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland. The 33-nation fieldwork was coordinated by GlobeScan and completed between October 2005 and January 2006" (PIPA 2006). In analyzing and presenting the evidence, I exclude the responses from the United States. I also exclude the responses from a country if the question under consideration is about that country. For additional information about the survey see: <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/>.

⁶ In Africa, 34 percent answered that American foreign policy has a positive effect and 32 percent said it has a negative effect. In West Asia, 39 percent said that it has a positive effect and 37 percent said it had a negative effect. However, for Asia as a whole, positive attitudes are much lower than for Africa because only 29 percent said that it has a positive effect and 50 percent said it has a negative effect in Asia-Pacific (Gallup International Association 2004). Within Sub Saharan Africa, national surveys were conducted in Nigeria and South Africa. Urban areas were sampled in Ghana, Kenya, and Cameroon. For more information see: <http://www.voice-of-the-people.net/>

III. Individual Traits and Pro-Americanism in Africa

What accounts for these relatively positive views of the United States among Africans? I begin to answer this question by comparing different individuals residing within Africa in order to gauge why some Africans have higher opinions of the United States than others. I investigate whether certain traits distinguish individuals who approve of the United States from those who disapprove. Statistical analysis allows us to evaluate the effect of a single trait while holding other attributes constant. For example, to evaluate the independent effect of gender on attitudes about the United States we can imagine comparing a man and a woman who are the same age and religion, and who have the same education, wealth, media habits, and so on. The model is estimated with a commonly used statistical technique: ordered logistical regression.

For the statistical analysis I use the 2002 Pew Global Attitudes Project Survey, which is the most comprehensive and readily available data on African attitudes towards the United States (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2002).⁷ I consider the separate influences on pro-American attitudes of: demographic and socio-economic characteristics (age, gender, rural location of residence, wealth,⁸ education, and knowledge⁹); media exposure (international news channels,¹⁰ television, newspapers, radio, and internet); personal contacts (friends or family in U.S.,¹¹ and travel to the U.S.); and religion.

Table 2 displays the results of the analysis. In the first column, a plus sign indicates that there is a significant positive relationship between that trait and approval of the U.S. A minus sign indicates a significant negative relationship between that trait and approval of the U.S. A zero indicates that there is no statistically significant relationship between the trait and attitudes about the United States.¹² For example, men are just as likely as women to approve of America. The second column provides a way to compare the strength of the influence.¹³ A higher number indicates a stronger effect. This number can be thought of as how likely it is that an individual will become more (or less) approving of the United States for each comparable increment of change. For example, the estimated effect of Muslim religion on approval of the United States (27.6) is three times as strong as the effect of wealth (9.2).

⁷ The dependent variable, Pro-American Attitudes, is based on a question that asks "Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of the United States". This measure provides a four point scale of general orientation towards the United States. The national and regional distributions are depicted in Figure 1, however the middle category, no opinion, is excluded. Those individuals who did not answer the question are dropped from the analysis.

⁸ I construct an index variable for wealth from four questions asking whether the respondent owns a cell phone and if their household has running water, a flush toilet, and a car

⁹ The Pew survey did not include questions designed to gauge awareness. Therefore, I constructed an index variable, as a proxy for knowledge, based on "don't know" responses to ten questions about various international issues such as terrorism, international trade, and the United Nations. For each survey question, the respondent received a point if they offered an answer, and they did not receive a point if they answered "don't know".

¹⁰ International news channels such as the BBC, CNN, Sky News, and CFI were mentioned as suggestions in the survey question.

¹¹ This variable records whether the respondent said they have friends or relatives living in the U.S. with whom they write, telephone, or visit regularly.

¹² Statistical significance is measured with a 95 percent confidence interval.

¹³ The number is the absolute value of the standardized percent change in the odds ratio.

Table 2: Ordered Logit Analysis of Pro-American Attitudes in Africa

	Direction of Estimated Effect	Standardized Size of Estimated Effect
Age	-	7.4
Gender (male)	0	
Rural	0	
Wealth	+	9.2
Education	0	
Knowledge	0	
Watch intl. news	+	7.9
Television	+	8.4
Newspaper	0	
Radio	-	7.7
Internet user	-	8.4
Contacts in U.S.	+	5.6
Traveled to U.S.	+	5.3
Muslim	-	27.6
Catholic	+	9.8

Source: Pew Research Center for People and the Press. 2002. "Global Attitudes Project 44-Nation Survey."

Age has a negative estimated influence on approval of the United States. Older respondents are less pro-American than younger respondents. Wealth on the other hand is positively related to pro-American sentiments. Africans who possess consumer goods and creature comforts in their homes are more likely to express positive views of the United States.

Individuals who watch international news channels and get their news from the television are more likely to be pro-American, as are Africans who communicate regularly with friends and family in the United States or are among those few who have traveled to the United States. However, individuals who get their news from the radio and who use the internet are less likely to report positive assessments of the United States. Gender, rural residence, education, knowledge, and newspaper readership are not significantly related to attitudes about the U.S.

The standardized numbers in the second column of Table 2 indicate that religion has the largest effect. In particular, the effect of being Muslim is nearly three times as large as the effect of any other trait. Just as the Muslim religion has a strong negative estimated effect on attitudes about the United States, Catholicism has a strong positive effect. Wealth has the next largest effect followed by the measures of where people get their news. The demographic traits and personal contacts seem to have less effect on how Africans view the United States.

IV. Evaluation of Hypotheses

What can this statistical analysis tell us about the phenomena that generate pro and anti-American attitudes? To gain a greater understanding I evaluate whether five different hypotheses about African attitudes are consistent with the evidence at hand.

Media Exposure and Knowledge of U.S. Policy

The first hypothesis is that Africans may be more pro-American because they are exposed to less information about U.S. policies than people who live elsewhere in the world. Dissatisfaction with American foreign policy seems to be one of the main causes of anti-Americanism elsewhere in the world. Africans tend to be less well informed about American policy due to lower media exposure and the limited range of media sources in Africa. The media landscape in Africa is still dominated by the government outlets. Furthermore, only a small minority of Africans have access to satellite TV, in contrast with the Middle East, Europe, and parts of Asia. Those who do have access to international news broadcasts usually tune in to programs from the United States and Europe rather than from other African countries. In essence, ‘the CNN effect’ is more limited in Africa and ‘the Al Jazeera Effect’ is non-existent. As a result, Africans probably have less access to information about American foreign policies, especially those policies which might detract from the U.S.’s positive image abroad.

The assumption underlying this hypothesis is that knowledge about U.S. foreign policies is associated with negative attitudes about America. If this were the case, then I would expect my proxy for knowledge of foreign issues to be negatively related to pro-American attitudes. I would also expect those Africans who are most exposed to information about the U.S. policies to be the least pro-American. Education, male gender, urban residence, watching international news channels, reading newspapers, using the internet, maintaining contacts in the United States, and travel to the United States should be negatively related to pro-American attitudes if the hypothesis is correct.

Strangely, the empirical evidence is not consistent with this hypothesis. Except for internet use, all of the estimated relationships are zero or the opposite of what the hypothesis would lead us to expect. It seems African support for the United States exists regardless of how much individuals know about U.S. policies.

While information per se does not seem to be related to attitudes about America, a person’s chosen source of information does seem to matter. Africans who get their news from television are significantly more inclined to say good things about the U.S. Television viewers in Africa are likely to be watching state-owned channels, especially when it comes to news programming. Since most African governments are dependent on western donors, it seems logical that they would be wary of publicly criticizing their benefactors on television.¹⁴ Thus, television viewers may face a more restricted and positive portrayal of the United States than individuals who get their news from more diversified sources such as radio, newspapers, and the internet.

¹⁴ It is possible that U.S. support for democratic activists could provoke authoritarian leaders to demonize foreign governments in their attempts to discredit their domestic opposition. This has already happened to varying degrees in places like Zimbabwe and Uganda. However, demonization of the U.S. exacts great economic and political costs for leaders and most will be deterred from taking such a stance.

Broadcasters on private FM stations and newspapers might feel less constrained, not only about criticizing their own governments, but also about criticizing foreign powers.¹⁵ It appears that particular news sources deliver different messages about whether or not U.S. policies are beneficial or harmful. As noted earlier, individuals who acquire information from personal contacts in America, and who travel to the United States, are also more pro-American.

In sum, it seems that Africans are more positively disposed towards the U.S., not because they know less, but because many people in Africa get their news from state-owned media outlets, which probably portray the United States in a positive light. Others found similar results in the Muslim world where exposure to different sources of information (most notably CNN versus Al Jazeera) have divergent effects on peoples' opinions about the U.S.. In Africa and the Muslim world—and possibly elsewhere—it seems that what people hear about U.S. policies matters more than how much they hear, at least in terms of shaping attitudes about America.

The United States as the Land of Milk and Honey

The second hypothesis is that the United States represents a place of economic and political opportunity and hope for many Africans. The public image of the United States in Africa tends to be one of immense wealth, educational and employment opportunities, political freedoms, and democracy. This image is reinforced by the media and cultural materials, as well as by Africans who have traveled abroad and by Americans who visit Africa. Views of the U.S. are certainly more complex than this, and resentment as well as admiration can also result from the perception of American wealth and power. However, it is plausible that 'the United States as the land of milk and honey' acts as a symbol of what many Africans hope to achieve, a place to which some hope to travel, and a source of benefits that can improve their lives in Africa.

If this hypothesis were correct, I would expect that those Africans who are best able to take advantage of educational, employment, and business opportunities would be most positively disposed towards the United States. Younger men who are urbanized, educated, and wealthy and plugged into the World Wide Web would be expected to be the most pro-American according to this hypothesis. In addition, people who have close friends and relatives in the United States and who have traveled here would be more likely to benefit directly or indirectly from U.S. wealth and political freedoms. These personal contacts, along with government and privately-owned television stations that screen American soap operas and television programs, which typically portray the most opulent sectors of American society, would be assumed to be the most influential sources for promoting the U.S. image as a land of great wealth and opportunity. If the second hypothesis is accurate, then Africans who watch television and have personal contacts with the U.S. should feel positively about America.

The empirical evidence presented in Table 2 is generally consistent with these predictions. Youth and wealth are significantly associated with pro-American attitudes, although gender and rural

¹⁵ It is true that the majority of Africans get their news from radio, but even Africans who are radio listeners are more pro-American than citizens in other regions of the world. Although radio is becoming more diversified in Africa, government broadcasts are still more widely available and popularly trusted than private stations. It may also be the case that private stations also portray a largely positive image of the U.S.. So, though radio broadcasts in Africa may be more diversified and critical of U.S. policies than television broadcasts, even Africans who listen to radio are probably exposed to more restricted and pro-American news programming than people who live in other regions.

residence are not. Internet use has the opposite effect. Television viewers are more pro-American, as are individuals with contacts in the U.S. and those who have traveled to the U.S.. In addition, in other analysis I found a strong relationship between pro-American sentiments and support for American ways of doing business, support for American ideas about democracy and support for globalization. Furthermore, Africa ranks higher along these three dimensions (fondness for U.S. business, ideas about democracy, and globalization) than any other region of the world. It appears that, within Africa, pro-American attitudes are closely tied to perceptions of the U.S. as a land of political and economic opportunity, and that Africans are more likely to hold these perceptions than non-Africans.

This is not to say that Africans are entirely satisfied with globalization or with U.S. business practices. A PIPA (2004b) survey of 8 African countries revealed that “while they show considerable enthusiasm for globalization, strong majorities of Africans (60% overall) believe that rich countries are not playing fair in trade negotiations with poor countries.” Similarly, in the Pew survey (2002), 71.1 percent expressed positive opinions about the U.S. and at the same time, a plurality of 40.7 percent said that U.S. policies increase the gap between rich and poor countries. However, it appears that Africans’ main complaints are that they are being left out of the globalization revolution and thus not benefiting as much as others from world trade and U.S. wealth. In general, Africans seem to desire more not fewer interactions with western powers. African animosities are thus very different from those that find expression in the “globalization backlash” that has swept through other regions of the world.

The United States as Cultural Icon

The third hypothesis is that America’s image in Africa benefits from the close ties and cross-fertilization between American and African culture, particularly with respect to popular culture. Africans and Americans of African descent have profoundly shaped American culture. Conversely, hip-hop culture is reflected in popular African dress and music, Hollywood films provide entertainment for millions in Africans, and Coca-Cola and hamburgers serve as refreshment even in the remotest locations. The visible presence of African-Americans in the music videos, films, and fashion magazines that are distributed in Africa promotes a feeling of cultural sharing rather than one of cultural imposition. It reinforces the image of the U.S. as both multi-racial and as a land of opportunity for Africans.

It also seems that culture provides a less salient mobilizing agent for Africans vis-à-vis the west than it does in more culturally homogeneous areas of the world. The ethnic and religious pluralism within countries as well as between countries in Africa means that no single cultural appeal is likely to attract a majority of the population. Those who sought to unite Africans around the notion of a shared ‘African’ identity in order to counter the power of external forces have not found fertile ground in the same ways that Arab Nationalism or Islamic brotherhood might have appealed to large sections of the population in the Middle East.

Many of the same individual-level traits mentioned in the previous section are also expected to be associated with those who would have the most access to and enjoyment of American popular culture: young wealthy city dwellers who watch television, use the internet, have contacts in the U.S. or have traveled there themselves, are more likely to have access to and enjoy American popular music, movies, television, food, and fashions.

As mentioned above, the data are generally supportive of these predictions. However, from the evidence presented in Table 2, I am unable to distinguish between the previous hypothesis and this one. From additional analysis, I found that the estimated influence of opinions about U.S. business (or democracy) is significantly greater than the influence of opinions of U.S. popular culture, although both effects are strong. This suggests that while both hypotheses may be correct, the former seems to be slightly more influential. Nevertheless, it seems likely that perceptions of America as a land of opportunity and affinities for American popular culture are mutually reinforcing orientations that together bolster pro-American attitudes.

Before I move on, I must also note the strong effect of religious culture on attitudes about the United States. Muslims are significantly more likely than non-Muslims to express anti-American attitudes and to reject American music, movies and television. The effects are the opposite for Catholics. The size of the estimated effect of being Muslim dwarfs the effects of other individual level traits, and approaches the estimated effects of the attitudinal variables. It is difficult to say whether the greater anti-Americanism among Muslims results from of a clash of culture or a difference of opinion on foreign policy, but it seems to be more the latter. When considering only Muslims respondents in Africa, the estimated effect of U.S. international policies is significantly greater than the effect of U.S. popular culture (whereas they were indistinguishable for the full sample).

The United States as an Anti-Colonial Power

The fourth hypothesis is that the United States continues to benefit from its historical anti-colonial stance, especially in comparison to the major European powers that had colonies in the region. In Africa, one might expect such resentments to be directed at former colonial powers in Europe rather than at the United States. Historical resentments may also be sustained by patterns of post-colonial involvement. American military interventions have been less visible in Sub Saharan Africa when compared to the campaigns of European powers. To be sure, the U.S. government did provide substantial financial and technical assistance to anti-communist insurgencies in Ethiopia, Angola and Mozambique in the 1980s. The United States was also involved in many covert operations, often with serious negative consequence, but most Africans are probably not well informed about these activities. By comparison, the Portuguese army fought long colonial wars well into the 1970s, and the French intervened militarily in the region in an often overtly partisan manner until the mid 1990s (including, notoriously, on behalf of the Hutu regime in Rwanda in 1994). Strikingly, the U.S. has refused involvement in any of the violent civil conflicts that have torn West Africa apart over the last two decades. In sharp contrast with other regions of the world, in Liberia today, it appears to be the absence of an American military intervention that is resented.

If colonial and anti-colonial historical legacies are at play, then I would expect older individuals to feel more positively about the United States. Older individuals would have been alive during colonial rule and may have been involved in, or at least aware of the independence struggles of anti-colonials. They would also be more likely to remember action taken by the U.S. in support of nationalist self-determination on the continent. However, this is not the case. Africans from earlier generations are significantly less inclined than the African youth to say positive things

about the United States. If anything, greater historical perspective is damning rather than flattering for America's image.

The data from two other public opinion polls also contradict the hypothesis that the U.S. derives support from its anti-colonial stance in Africa. African resentment of foreign powers does not appear to be focused more on their former colonizers in Europe than on America. In general, African respondents from the eight countries surveyed in the 2005/6 BBC World Service poll reported that Britain, England, and Europe were having a more positive influence on the world than the U.S.—although this was also true in every other region of the world (PIPA 2006).¹⁶ More tellingly, Africans in each of the former British colonies rated Britain higher than did Africans in former French or Belgian colonies.¹⁷ Former subjects of the British crown also rated Britain better than the U.S. on average, while Africans who were not in former British colonies were more approving of the U.S. than Britain. Respondents in Senegal, the only former French colony surveyed in Africa, had a higher opinion of France than any of the African countries. Senegalese respondents also viewed France more positively than the U.S., while respondents in other countries rated the U.S. higher than France on average. Evidence from additional African countries, especially former French colonies, is necessary to draw firm conclusions. Nevertheless, it seems that Africans feel most attracted to their former European rulers. Contrary to the hypothesis, the United States looks less, not more, favorable in comparison to former colonial powers.

Last, individual-level evidence from an additional opinion poll conducted by PIPA at the end of 2003 implies that Africans form attitudes about the U.S. in conjunction with rather than in contrast to their attitudes about Europe. In a report on the survey of 7,556 Africans in seven Sub Saharan African countries,¹⁸ the authors write: "Perhaps most interesting, views of Europe are very positively correlated with positive views of the U.S.. Africans do not appear to be making a distinction between Europe and the U.S.". The same process seems to generate attitudes about Europe and attitudes about the U.S..

In sum, the thesis that support for the U.S. is a function of its anti-colonial stance (in contrast with Europe) is at odds with evidence from three different public opinion polls: 1) those with greater historical perspective are less, not more, supportive of the U.S.; 2) to my surprise, Africans seem to prefer their former colonial rulers more than the U.S.; and 3) those who disapprove of former colonial powers are also more likely to reject the U.S.. America does not look better because, historically, it was less involved in Africa, and any antipathy towards Europe is likely to generate condemnation of the U.S. as well.

¹⁶ These results are based on the approval index for attitudes towards the U.S. (percentage of positive minus percentage of negative responses), minus a similarly constructed index for attitudes towards the other country. This tells us the degree to which the excess of positive attitudes towards the United States exceeds (or lags behind) the excess of positive attitudes towards the other country.

¹⁷ The former British colonies surveyed include Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. The survey also included the Democratic Republic of Congo and Senegal. The results reported here are the same regardless of whether South Africa is included in the list of former British colonies or not.

¹⁸ The PIPA survey was conducted in the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.

The United States as a Multi-Racial Society

The final hypothesis is that the image of the United States in Africa is bolstered by a perception in Africa that America is a multi-racial society. The presence of African-Americans in positions of power and importance is viewed as evidence that U.S. society is open to men and women of African origin. To be sure, Africans are aware of the legacy of slavery and racism in the U.S.. Nonetheless, one might expect that the United States is viewed in a favorable light in comparison with the European countries on this front as well. The fact that a French or British equivalent to Colin Powell or Condoleeza Rice is at present more or less inconceivable, is important to shaping attitudes about the United States as a society which offers greater possibilities to men and women of color.

Unfortunately, the available evidence is insufficient to evaluate the hypothesis and what little I can glean from the data presents a contradictory picture. Those who get their news from television would be most likely to know about African-American leaders such as Colin Powell or Condoleeza Rice. As expected, television has a positive influence on attitudes about the United States, although this can be for alternative reasons mentioned earlier. On the flip side, I have already noted that the African respondents do not like the United States better than Europe as this thesis also implies. There is no evidence that the image of Europe suffers relative to America due to a perception of more restricted opportunity for Africans or African-Americans. Support for American ways of doing business, ideas about democracy, and popular culture may be enhanced by the presence of African-Americans in American movies, television, videos, and magazines, but I do not have the empirical evidence to test this hypothesis.

V. Conclusion

Why are Africans so approving of the United States and why are pro-American attitudes more prevalent in Africa than elsewhere in the world? My analysis of public opinion data yields several tentative conclusions. First, I think that Africans are primarily exposed to positive images of the United States in their media. African governments dependent on foreign aid are especially wary of criticizing western powers. News programs created by state-controlled media houses, as well as international programs distributed by western sources, are likely to be especially flattering to the United States. Such sources still dominate Africa's media landscape. Contrary to my initial expectations, knowledge of U.S. foreign policies does not seem to alter attitudes about America. However, the tone of particular sources does appear to be important. Television, international programs, personal contacts, and travel increases support for the United States and radio and internet use reduce it.

The evidence is consistent with the second and third hypotheses. The United States seems to benefit from its image as a source of economic and political opportunity, as well as from its desirable popular culture. America is admired as 'a land of milk, honey, Hollywood, and hip-hop' and approval of American business, democracy, and popular culture is higher in Africa than in other regions.

The evidence at hand contradicts the notion that Africans favor the U.S. relative to Europe because of its anti-colonial stance, and I lack the evidence to evaluate whether Africans

appreciate America because it is seen as a multi-racial society. However, I can say that racial tensions within Europe do not seem to make the U.S. look better in comparison.

What effect does the abundance of popular support for the United States within Africa have on political outcomes? My contention is that the direct effects of public opinion on government policies are likely to be somewhat muted in Africa where leaders have little leverage vis-à-vis the United States. African governments are heavily dependent on foreign assistance and face potentially devastating expected costs for acting against U.S. interests on important issues, even if their publics support them.¹⁹ Eritrea and Ethiopia joined the “coalition of the willing” in order to curry favor with international power brokers and donors, not because of demands from their populations.

In contrast to the effect of foreign policy, mass attitudes are likely to be far more important for U.S. programs aimed at mobilizing African publics for state-building, democratization, development, and anti-terrorism. Increasingly, U.S. agencies are bypassing national governments to work with non-state actors and local-level leaders. It is precisely in these arenas that popular opinions matter most. Furthermore, the success of these grass roots mobilization campaigns are more important for securing U.S. interests in the region than whether or not African governments lend their (usually verbal) support to U.S. military campaigns or sign favored international agreements. In short pro-Americanism among the mass public enhances U.S. soft power in the region thereby facilitating the achievement of U.S. policy goals

How are attitudes likely to change in the future? This exercise is necessarily speculative and depends on assumptions about the continuity of causal processes over time. Nevertheless, I can make a few observations about future trends. First, it is important to note that the individual-level analysis in this paper employed Pew survey data that was collected prior to the 2003 Iraq War (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2002). It is possible that things have already changed. It is very difficult to determine exact trends over time from the available data for Africa. Comparisons across different surveys are fraught with difficulty because question wording and survey sampling procedures vary from one polling agency to another. Perhaps there was some slippage in the standing of the U.S., especially just after the war began, but it is fair to say that within Africa as a whole, there was not a dramatic or ubiquitous secular decline in positive attitudes about the U.S. as a result of the war.

The best comparable trend data from a single pollster comes from the Gallup Voice of the People surveys; though they only collected data over time for five countries and the data is limited to a one or two year spread (Gallup International Association 2004). From January to May 2003, South Africa, Uganda, Nigeria and Kenya showed a decline in approval of American foreign policy, possibly as a result of the Iraq War. However, by December, South Africa and Uganda had bounced back to higher levels than in January. Nigeria and Kenya continued to slide in their approval of U.S. foreign policy. Cameroon was the main exception. Attitudes towards U.S. policy rose from January to May and then fell between May and December though they remained higher than in January (Gallup International Association 2004). We can also look at self-reported change in attitudes. In a 2003 poll commissioned by the State Department’s Office

¹⁹ Leaders who lose the favor of Western governments may be more willing to publicly act against the interests of the U.S. thereafter.

of Research, respondents in six African countries were asked whether their view of the United States had changed in the past year. Pluralities in Senegal, Nigeria, Cameroon, Kenya, and Tanzania reported that their opinions had not changed. In Ghana a plurality of 35 percent said that their opinions were more favorable. Of those who said their opinions had changed, a majority said that their opinions were less favorable in Senegal, Cameroon, Kenya, and Tanzania, while a majority said their opinions were more favorable in Ghana and Nigeria. Nationally representative samples were acquired in Ghana, Nigeria, and Cameroon, and urban samples were taken for Senegal, Kenya and Tanzania (Howard 2004, 4). Finally, the 2004 Gallup Voice of the People Survey and the 2005/6 BBC World Service poll record that, long after the war began, African support for the U.S. remains both widespread and higher than in other regions (Gallup International Association 2004; PIPA 2006).

Nonetheless, it is clear that the unilateralism of the present administration is viewed negatively in the region, particularly by elites.²⁰ As citizens of poor countries, Africans are more likely to believe in the central importance of multilateralism and in the United Nations, and to oppose a foreign policy which systematically undermines that institution. It is difficult to tell whether the increasingly negative attitudes towards the present administration and its policies will translate into a more permanent shift in attitudes towards the United States. I suspect the answer to this question depends in large part on the evolution of American policy over the next decade. The U.S. retains a positive image because of general factors described in this testimony which have demonstrated lasting influence. But the U.S. may come to be viewed in a sharply different light in the coming years if current administration policies are sustained.

Furthermore, it does seem that selected Muslim populations have lost much of their faith in America. Polling data suggests that Muslims in Africa, especially in homogeneous Islamic areas within countries, are more likely to oppose this administration's current policies in the Middle East. However, it seems that non-Muslim populations (notably in countries such as Nigeria where there are religious tensions) may have adopted a more positive view in reaction to Muslim attitudes (Howard 2004, 7-8). So even if average levels of support for the U.S. are stable, opinions may become more polarized over time.

Moreover, if sympathy to the U.S. is based on lack of exposure to critical media, this may change in the future as media diversifies. It is important to recognize that growing media penetration or familiarity with the U.S. will not necessarily alter opinions of America. Attitudes will depend on what kind of media and contacts Africans are exposed to in the future. Televisions are becoming more prevalent, which would suggest a growth in pro-American attitudes. Yet, at the same time, privately-owned and foreign media are attracting larger audiences in Africa. The growth of private broadcasters may spell the decline of flattering U.S. images that Africans currently see on their television sets, just as it has already begun to change the messages that Africans hear on their radios. For example, if Africans tune in to the new Al

²⁰ For example, in a PIPA public opinion poll conducted in July and August 2004, a plurality of survey respondents in Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, and Tanzania claimed that: "the foreign policy of President George W. Bush made them feel worse about the United States". Respondents in these same countries said they preferred to see John Kerry, rather than George W. Bush, win the U.S. presidential election. Only in Nigeria did more respondents say that Bush's policies made them feel better. A larger number Nigerians said they preferred Bush to win the election than Kerry (PIPA 2004a). For additional survey results on African attitudes about recent U.S. foreign policies see Howard (2004).

Jazeera English-language service, watching television and international news channels may generate negative rather than positive changes in attitudes towards the U.S.

Our analysis suggests that the United States can counter these potentially negative influences with public diplomacy campaigns via the media, as well as by increasing points of personal contact. Work or travel visas and educational scholarships seem to have lasting positive influences on those individuals who spend time in the U.S. More importantly, they also increase support for America among the many friends and family who remain in Africa. Additionally, if more Africans are able to enjoy the economic, political, and cultural benefits of globalization, support for the United States should increase. The statistical results imply that greater access to American goods, business opportunities, cultural exchanges, development resources and democracy assistance would be welcomed by Africans, and would help to ensure that the U.S. retains its many allies in the African mass public.

Finally, I want to reiterate that the images of the United States and Europe are linked in the minds of most Africans. Rather than making the U.S. look better in comparison, the anger and resentment of immigrant populations in Europe (that boiled over into riots in Paris last November) may soil the image of the U.S. as well. Likewise, unpopular U.S. actions abroad could impact Europe's standing in Africa even if it does not support such actions. Definite conclusions must await additional data, but it seems that the fates of western countries are linked when it comes to their soft power in Africa. Thus it behooves western governments to work together on public diplomacy rather than in opposition to one another.

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